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Dianne Wampler 07/02/2007 07:03:07 PM From DB/Inbox: Dianne Wampler

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UNCLAS ANKARA 01686

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ACTION: PA
INFO: DCM CONS MGT ECON AMB POL PMA

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2811
INFO RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2961
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 2090
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001686

SIPDIS

STATE FOR HR/ELO from Mission Turkey FAST Officers

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [AMGT](#) [APER](#) [KSPR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: Mission Turkey: FAST Forward

¶1. (U) Mission Turkey's First and Second Tour (FAST) contingent is comprised of twenty-four generalists and fifteen specialists, assigned to Ankara, Istanbul, and Adana. The Mission's FAST program of professional development culminates each year in a day-long conference dedicated to discussion and debate of both policy and personnel issues. This year's conference featured presentations by the Director of the Turkish Diplomatic Training Institute, a prominent Turkish columnist, and a DVC discussion with the Senior Fellow coordinating SAIC's Embassy of the Future project.

¶2. (U) Mission Turkey's FAST officers are proud to serve in this dynamic, fast-paced mission. We are honored to work in a place and time where our jobs have a real impact on American foreign policy. In the course of the conference and in on-going exchanges, several professional concerns and programmatic suggestions have emerged. These concerns and suggestions - not a consensus view but a general snapshot - are outlined below. They are offered as constructive input for Department decision-makers to consider as we proceed together to improve the quality of life and work in today's Foreign Service.

Personnel Practices: Greater Equity and Substantive Breadth

¶3. (U) We understand the premier role of the Foreign Service in advancing the President's objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan. As committed public servants, we understand that government service requires personal sacrifice under difficult circumstances, and we are prepared to play our part. However, as we do so, it is essential that the personnel system operate in an equitable and integral fashion. In this regard, we find the recent introduction of retroactive measures on hardship criteria and length of domestic assignments to be inconsistent and unfair. We suggest that the retroactive component of this initiative be withdrawn.

¶4. (U) As entry level professionals, we face the dual demands of

acquiring specific expertise while also exploring the breadth of USG foreign affairs activities. While short-term informal rotations are a part of the Mission's FAST program, we believe a more structured approach is necessary. We were troubled to learn that one of the few formal rotational positions in Turkey (an Econ-Con rotation) was recently eliminated by HR and we suggest that this position be reinstated and others be created.

¶15. (U) We also believe that some consideration should be given to first tours inside the Department. Some colleagues believe that going directly into the field after A-100 left them ill-prepared for the kind of policy work they faced at post. Gaining perspectives on the culture and flow of information in Washington as a first tour would make second-tour work in the field more effective.

Family Issues: Getting the Work/Life Balance Right

¶16. (U) Foreign Service life imposes unique and at times considerable demands on families. In our judgment, the Department needs to give additional consideration to employment opportunities for spouses and adult family members. Other foreign affairs agencies appear to have both greater flexibility and funding for this key concern. The creation of a para-professional corps that maximizes spouses' skill bases across geographic assignments would be a major step beyond the limited consular assistant opportunities currently available.

¶17. (U) We also believe the Department needs to do more to address the needs of non-traditional families, unmarried partners, and same sex partners. The addition of partners to government travel orders, with full EFM status, would bring the Department on a par with other European Diplomatic Services.

¶18. (U) Additional training, on substantive issues, security matters, and cultural adjustment, for family members would help create a more cohesive overseas community. Our family members are too often treated as an after thought, with training only being offered on a space available basis at the last minute. This approach needs to change if we are to remain a high morale and tightly knit foreign service family.

Resources: World Class Diplomacy Requires Funding

¶19. (U) A consistent theme of our FAST discussion is the Department's inadequate resource base. The Embassy's Chancery compound is extremely old and woefully inadequate for the USG personnel it currently houses. Cramped conditions, with double and sometime triple occupancy in offices, degrade efficiency and productivity.

¶110. (U) Another substantial problem is the lack of adequate communication and IT systems. We are a generation that understands information technology, and we require systems that will maximize our effectiveness. Firstly, this means faster internet connections (especially on classified systems). The software used on these systems (such as ACS Plus, Post EVDB, and Cable Express) is for the most part functionally inferior, user unfriendly, and more expensive to create and maintain than commercially produced products which could easily be adapted to Department use at little cost. (The adaptation of wiki software for use in Intellipedia is a good example of this.) Providing remote devices that include job-specific applications (such as consular applications) that allow us to enter data on the move would be helpful.

¶111. (U) We also find the current vouchering system to be slow, paperwork-heavy, and, financially burdensome on the individual. We suggest that government credit cards be issued to all staff -- regardless of rank -- for use in professional travel, or that travel advances be made available for all professional travel, both international and in-country.

¶112. (U) We realize that resources are constrained throughout the government. At the same time, we believe that trying to conduct diplomacy on the cheap undermines our effectiveness and disservices American foreign policy. In budget submissions to Congress, the White House needs to make greater funding for diplomacy a priority and our advocacy on the Hill needs to be intensive and sustained.

Training: Providing Skills Essential for Success

¶13. (U) While individual effort, tenacity and dedication can compensate for much, we believe one of the most crucial factors in professional success is adequate and targeted training. As a general point, we believe that more and better quality training should be offered. We also suggest consideration of an A-100 module on the history of US foreign policy as well as the process or component parts of effective policy execution.

¶14. (U) Many of us have watched colleagues "coast" through long-term language training and we believe that disincentives for poor performance should be considered.

¶15. (U) Specialist colleagues are particularly concerned about the lack of opportunities for substantive and language training. Specialist positions, including OMS and IMS, should be language designated. The current policy of sending most specialists to post without language training undercuts effectiveness.

WILSON